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Value Orientation of Pupils at the Elementary School

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Abstract

The paper deal with the results of the research investigation focused on aspects of quality of life. The aim of the research was to find out what the quality of life indicators were from pupils' descriptions. Respondents were 12-15 year old pupils with which a non-standardized questionnaire survey was carried out. The outputs of the research show the strong need of social support for selected age groups. Important tasks for teachers arise from the findings: mitigation of negative tendencies, strengthening of quality social ties and modeling examples of proper behavior.

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1. Introduction

The research activities detecting individual perceptions of quality of life, proves that so far only respondents with a disease or individual adults were researched. Only recently, researchers have turned their attention to children and adolescents. Therefore, we focused on the developmental stage of early adolescence, which is a unique constellation of biological factors, reflected or non-reflected personal experiences, life experiences, current needs and interaction with other people (like parents, peers, close friends and other authorities). The mentioned development period is a big step into partnerships; a child takes on new roles and statuses among friends and in their family. Social development is characterized by a greater autonomy and disengagement from family dependency, but of course

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despite the high need of togetherness with their peer group, parents remain the main emotional and social support for early adolescents (Lašek, & Loudová, 2013). The recognition of values through children's eyes can help the children, teachers and parents, and become a conceivable impulse to interventions.

2. Research Question

What is considered to be an excellent, normal and a bad life by today's early adolescent children?

3. Methodology of Research

In October 2013, from the second level primary school pupils were invited to fill out a non-standardized questionnaire. The investigation was made for pupils aged 12-15 years and it is necessary to say that respondents were not specially selected and were not informed in advance of intentions and progress of the research probe. After receiving information about the investigation, 172 respondents completed the questionnaire with informed teachers. The questionnaire is non-standardized and has a custom design (Koudelková, 2002). Pupils were assigned to create a description of three levels of life. The goal was to find out how pupils explained the characteristics of a bad, normal or excellent life. We have received 172 respondent descriptions of certain categories of life (Svatoš & Švarcová, 2006).

Table No. 1 Gender and age of respondents: frequency analysis (N=172)

gender	age				total
	12	13	14	15	
boys	20	15	24	41	100
girls	13	15	22	22	72
total	33	30	46	63	172

4. The Results of Pupils' Analysis

All the responses were recorded and analyzed statement to statement (Pelikán,1998). Successively arising categories were further edited until we reached the content-related semantic unification (the content transformation) and expressed pair representations of each type: to be/not to be, to have/not to have and to live/not to live. This material helped to create the three part table with the transformed statements for each "type of life". The statement database of the indicators of the quality of life arose, seen through the eyes of teenagers aged 12-15 years (see table 2). This table was used as a basis for further research.

Table No. 2 - Frequency of Statements for Three Levels of Quality of Life

Quality of Life	Number of statements
Bad life	465
Normal life	422
Excellent life	529
Total	1416

We examined the frequency of identical customized statements, we worked with a PivotTable and we organized items in charts. The most important indicator for the quality of life turned out to be comradeship and friendship. The most frequently occurring teenager statements were not surprising. Most children desire for quality friendly relations, a functioning family and stable financial security. Children also realize that difficulties and overcoming obstacles is part of a normal life. A normal life is perceived as something mediocre: *to have an ordinary number of friends, to be academically average at school, to have a reasonable healthy lifestyle and be financially sufficient*. As it is evident from the table, the biggest problem for children was to fulfill the cell for a normal life, while to describe an excellent life was easy, which shows the frequency of expressions for an easy life. A bad life is perceived by respondents as a life without family background, when a child has problems with parents, with housing, living in poverty, low academic results, occasional use of addictive substances (alcohol, cigarettes) and ill-behaviour. A bad life is represented by statements: *to have divorced parents; to live in a children's home; be beaten by parents; have bad parents, have a lack of money; not to be loved; to have unemployed parents*, there is also mention of pathological phenomena, such as: *to be a habitual drinker; to be a smoker and have alcoholic parents*. There are statements in the texts referring to education and quality of free time: *not to have quality education; not to have any hobbies*, etc. It is good to notice that the need to behave properly was mentioned to be desired socially, as in the rubric of a bad life, some respondents reported: *not to have discipline; be badly raised; be argumentative, to lead an inactive life*, etc. An interesting result came in terms of sibling relationships, where a bad life brought statements like *to have many siblings* and for a great life *to live without siblings*. However, these statements' importance cannot be overestimated as those were quite rare. Empirical research was primarily focusing on poor family background: *divorced parents, unhelpful parents and poor financial conditions*. There were differences between boys and girls: boys do not like overly strict (beating) parents and a lack of sport, girls perceived more a lack of education and poor upbringing. There were not any differences in age in this part of the work.

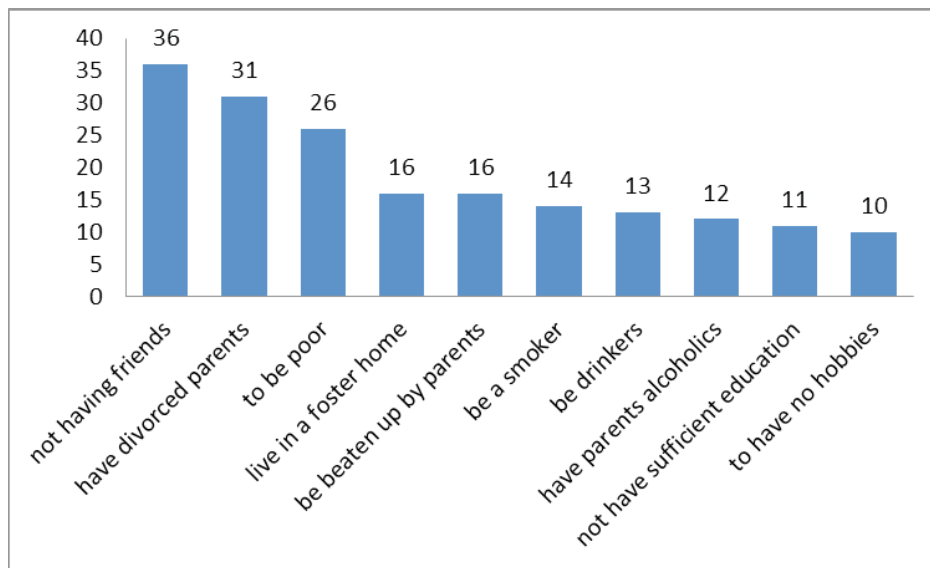


Figure 1. Bad life through the eyes of pupils

According to our respondents, a typical bad life of a child means an individual who does not have any friends, lives in a broken dysfunctional family (possibly in a children's home), is abused, probably smokes and drinks alcohol, is uneducated and does not spend their free time actively. It is obvious that our respondents are aware of the inappropriateness of drinking alcohol and smoking, but still some of them indicated in the first part of the

questionnaire that alcohol was an important part of life. Research shows that they know what is good and what is bad, they have the information, but at the same time they are willing to succumb. Due to this reason, constant vigilance from adults is necessary and the urgency not to ease up with any kind of prevention leading towards the protection of youth against using addictive substances. *He does not have many friends he which he can trust and maybe doesn't even have a place to live.* (Radek, 15 years old, 2007). *They are mostly people who don't have a lot of friends or family.* (Lucie, 14 years old, 2007). It is obvious from these illustrative statements of pupils that the relationship with the child of the same age is mentioned in the first place and family is mentioned right after it.

The term *normal life*, in testimonies of the pupils, means a certain amount of dullness and ordinariness, however, even in this part of the survey respondents mostly put friends at the first place and mostly the need for peer relations, and right after that the need to have a reliable family appears. It corresponds to the previous findings and characteristics of a pubescent child in the theoretical part of the work. The item *to have a reasonable amount of money* signals an awareness of the needs of the basic amount of finance to cover expenses for a normal life and the need to have pocket money is associated. The term peaceful life in this category indicates that the normal life is not exciting for our respondents, and health as one of the basic items of normal life is taken for granted. Normal parents demand specific requirements of their child. For example, the child is required to help with chores at home. The child in the category of normal life is dressed in an average way, has an average amount of money and is also average at school, is quite healthy, has good relationships with people, does sports occasionally, is friendly and expresses a typical sentence like this:

I imagine a normal life is that my family is completely perfect and that they are tolerant. We go on trips and enjoy life, understand people around me and do not have communication problems. (Milan, 14 years old)

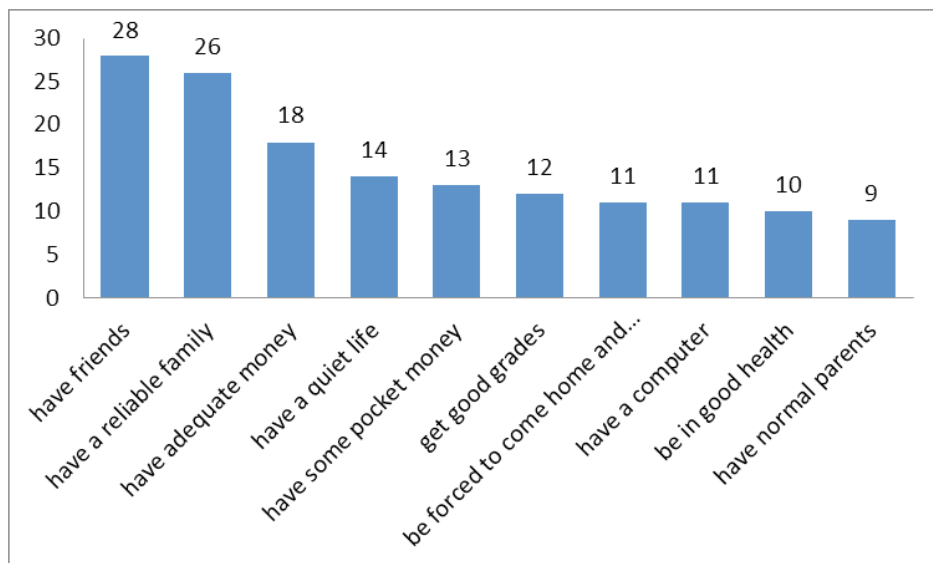


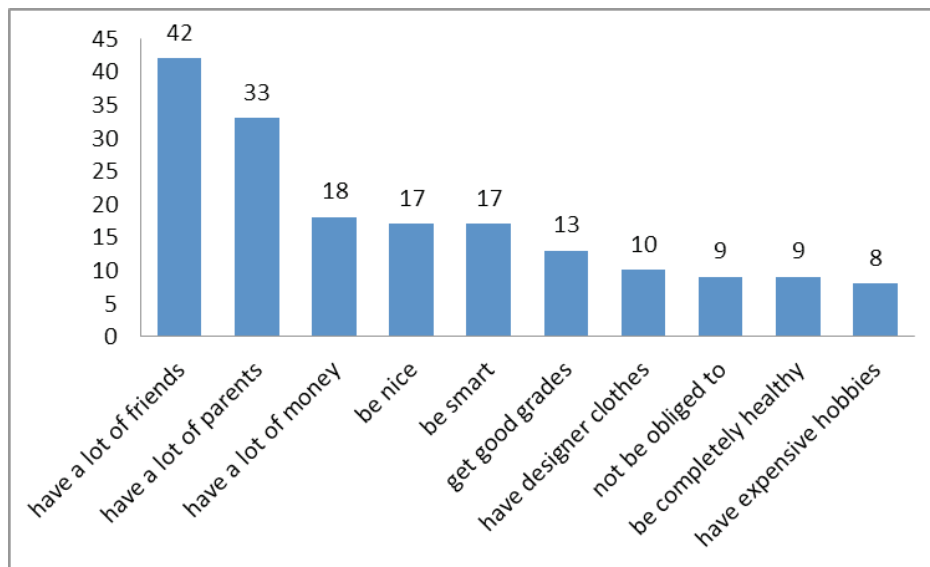
Figure 2. Normal life through the eyes of pupils

When we compare differences between an excellent and normal life, the statements of pupils are largely identical, however, these similar entries rose and eventually intensified: *to have a lot of friends, to have a great relationship with parents, to have excellent school results, to have lots of money, to have everything he/she wants, to have rich parents, to have expensive hobbies, to be a great athlete, to wear name brand clothes, to be completely healthy.* There are also interesting criticisms of this "type" of life, such as: *being spoiled.* Some statements from the rank excellent life indicate the desire for living above standard requirements in terms of comfort and freedom: *to*

have a maid at home; to live in a mansion; stay out as long as I want; be allowed to go to the disco. A more significant difference is noticeable between normal life and bad life than between excellent and normal life. The interesting points is the understanding of the meaning of having normal parents for a „normal life“ and have good parents for a „good life“. The phrase *good parents* have referred to some of our respondents being benevolent, or not demanding. However, for some other respondents a *normal parent* may be any parent; the main thing is that the child did not come from a children's home. Another interesting item, which is not surprising, is aesthetic appearance, which occurs only at the excellent life and indicates the need for physical beauty for this type of life.

Looking at differences due to their age, it showed that in this part of the questionnaire, the 12 year old pupils stated more extreme items like the idea of a hypothetical excellent life and more often associated an alternative: *to possess what he/she wants, to own a wonderful mansion*, but also *to be popular among all*. With 15 year old respondents these statements appeared more often: *to have a great family, good academic results in school*, which is understood as a retreat from the fantastic imaginary ideas of what is considered to be as a great life and can be seen as moving towards realistic, obtainable values, which is achieved mostly by their own efforts. The gender differences were not seen in this part of the research. **The tendency to "possess" at the expense of "to be" is obvious.**

Figure 3. Excellent life through the eyes of pupils



5. Conclusion

Despite a significant preference for high quality social bonds we realize from many statements the tendency towards consumerism (see the chart excellent life) or comfortableness: *to have lots of money, expensive hobbies, brand name clothing, and no obligations*. These statements were not rare. On the other hand, the pupils are aware of the need for education (see the chart a normal life): *have good grades*. The negative aspect for them is a lack of quality leisure activities: *to not have hobbies*. Respondents include *good grades and help with chores at home* in the category *normal life*; it says that if life is not excellent, it is necessary to work and have obligations. The health item has a lower preference but pupils reflect on it. This is because young people come into contact with diseases less than older generations. They did not prefer "health care", but they immediately explained that they take it for granted in their age and that care and concern about health comes with advancing age (except for when the pupil has a face to face encounter with illness or disability). Teachers of these pupils repeatedly express the complexity of influencing pupils' habits and directing their value orientation. However, teachers also act according to their own implicit theories of normality, which are burdened with their own subjective perception and subjective experience (Havigerová, 2012). Teachers try to influence pupils (in the designated area) not only during their subject classes, but also in all school projects. They try to impress them in a cognitive component (information, knowledge), experiential (situational games, role playing), they strive for a balanced ratio of work and relaxation (a balanced schedule, offering leisure activities) and press the quality of social interaction (the adaptation stays, class information meetings with the main teacher). However, often it is based rather of their own assumptions than of the questions, feelings and needs of pupils (Havigerová, Haviger, 2012). School is an important educational institution and should not be indifferent to the various signals of negative effects. School should build an exemplary and stimulating environment and keep in mind that enhancing life is only possible when the quality of its education is improved. This is a challenge for all those who are involved in the formation of manners of the young generation.

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